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Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources

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Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan

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Note by the Secretary-General

In its resolution 2005/51 of 27 July 2005, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, through the Council, a report on the implementation of that resolution. The Assembly, in its resolution 60/183 of 22 December 2005, also requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to it at its sixty-first session. The annexed report, which has been prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, is submitted in response to the two resolutions.

* A/61/50.
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Annex

Report prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan*

Summary

The occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel continues to deepen the economic and social hardship of Palestinians. Citing the right to self-defence, the Israeli army continues to mount military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory, frequently employing arbitrary detention, the disproportionate use of force, home demolition, severe mobility restrictions and closure policies.

The Israeli closure system remains a primary cause of poverty and humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, and restricts Palestinian access to health and education services, employment, markets and social and religious networks. Israeli restrictions also impede humanitarian services to the occupied territory. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East alone incurred over $10 million in losses in 2005.

While the Palestinian gross domestic product grew in 2005 by some 6 per cent, economic indicators continue to show negative trends. Unemployment and poverty rates remained high, estimated at 23 per cent and 62 per cent respectively.

Israel's confiscation of Palestinian land and water resources for settlements and the construction of the West Bank barrier accelerated during 2005. Israeli settlements, land confiscation and the construction of a barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory, contrary to the Geneva Convention and other norms of international law, isolate occupied East Jerusalem, bisect the West Bank and curtail normal economic and social life.

Refugees, women and children bear a significant brunt of these measures. Malnutrition and other health problems afflict a growing number of Palestinians at a time of curtailed access to needed services. There are 350,000 children under the age of five who suffer from chronic malnutrition.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2005/51 of 27 July 2005, the Economic and Social Council stressed the importance of reviving the Middle East peace process on the basis of Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1544 (2004), and the principle of land for peace, as well as compliance with the agreements reached between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the representative of the Palestinian people. In the same resolution, the Economic and Social Council reaffirmed the applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949,[1] to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967; stressed the need to preserve the national unity and the territorial integrity of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to guarantee the freedom of movement of persons and goods in the Territory, including the removal of restrictions going to and from East Jerusalem, and the freedom of movement to and from the outside world; also stressed that the wall being constructed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, is contrary to international law and is seriously debilitating to the economic and social development of the Palestinian people, and called in this regard for full compliance with legal obligations mentioned in the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/ES-10/273 and Corr.1) and in General Assembly resolution ES-10/15. The resolution reaffirmed the inalienable right of the Palestinian people and the Arab population of the occupied Syrian Golan to all their natural and economic resources, and called upon Israel, the occupying Power, not to exploit, endanger or cause loss or depletion of these resources; it also reaffirmed that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan, are illegal and an obstacle to economic and social development; and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly, through the Council, a report on the implementation of the resolution.

2. In its resolution 60/183 of 22 December 2005, the General Assembly reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the population of the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources, including land and water, and called upon Israel, the occupying Power, not to exploit, damage, cause loss or depletion of or endanger the natural resources in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan; affirming the right of the Palestinian people to claim restitution as a result of any exploitation, damage, loss or depletion, or endangerment of their natural resources resulting from illegal measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupying Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Assembly stressed that the wall being constructed by Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, is contrary to international law and deprives the Palestinian people of their natural resources, and called in this regard for full compliance with the legal obligations stipulated in the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and General Assembly resolution ES-10/15. The Assembly called on Israel, the occupying Power, to cease the dumping of all kinds of waste materials in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East

[1] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 75, No. 973.

Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan, which gravely threaten their natural resources, namely the water and land resources, and pose an environmental hazard and health threat to the civilian populations. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to it at its sixty-first session on the implementation of the resolution.

II. Occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem

Death and injuries

3. In 2005, 180 Palestinian fatalities and 1,554 injuries were recorded in the West Bank. In the Gaza Strip, 99 Palestinian fatalities and 266 injuries were recorded. Four of those killed, and nine of the wounded, were pupils of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). One of the deaths occurred while the pupil was inside the classroom.[2] Since January 2006, some 50 Palestinian children were injured and 11 died owing to the conflict.[3] Civilian casualties are mainly caused by the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli army.

4. Israeli forces continued to conduct extrajudicial killings of Palestinians suspected of involvement in armed attacks against Israelis. According to the Palestinian Human Rights Group, between 1 January 2005 and 1 January 2006 such attacks resulted in the killing of 34 suspected militants and 13 bystanders. The Palestinian Human Rights Group further reports that during the same period, Israeli settlers killed nine Palestinians, without recourse for victims or judicial consequence for perpetrators. Israelis recorded eight fatalities caused by Palestinian militants.[4]

5. The Secretary-General has repeatedly called on all parties to the conflict to abide by their obligations under international law, in particular to ensure the protection of the civilian population, both Palestinian and Israeli (see SG/SM/10358).

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

6. Over 9,000 Palestinian political prisoners currently remain in Israeli prisons, including approximately 129 Palestinian women prisoners. In its annual summary, the Palestinian Human Rights Group reports that, without any charge or judicial process, 741 Palestinians, including 11 women, are in administrative detention. Of those, 74 are being held pending trial and 44 have been sentenced. Of the women prisoners, 12 are under the age of 18.[5] According to the Israeli-based Women's Organization for Political Prisoners, most women political prisoners are held in Hasharon (Tel Mond) Prison, but some remain in Neve Tirza Prison and other

[2] UNRWA contribution to the report (9 February 2006); Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian update — emerging humanitarian risks" (January 2006) (www.ochaopt.org).

[3] UNICEF Humanitarian Action, Occupied Palestinian Territory donor update, 8 March 2005.

[4] The Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, "Annual summary" (www.phrmg.org/pressrelease/2005/January%,%202006.htm); PHRMG is a Palestinian NGO.

[5] Report of the Palestinian Ministry of Prisoner Affairs, "Palestinian women prisoners in Israeli prisons" (2005) (see www.btselem.org/english/Administrative_Detention/Statistics.asp).

detention centres. Daily life of women prisoners and the general conditions in the prisons are very harsh.[6] Israeli detention centres hold some 344 children.[3]

7. On 14 March 2006, Israeli forces attacked a Palestine Authority-controlled prison compound in Jericho and took into custody, among many others, Ahmed Sa'dat, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who had been accused of involvement in 2001 murder of an Israeli minister.

Population displacement

8. Registered refugees form 29 per cent of the West Bank's Palestinian population and 70 per cent of the total Gaza Strip population.[7]

9. At least 60,000 Palestinian residents of occupied East Jerusalem with Israeli identity cards, including 3,600 school-age children, will be closed outside the "Jerusalem envelope," as the barrier prevents them from reaching the municipal centre.[8] This phenomenon also affects 11,000 persons already separated from their livelihood in the "closed zone" (west of the barrier) (see A/60/271, para. 20). The most impoverished are those who have been historically displaced and are again made destitute. The typically landless, labouring refugees, especially those losing their agricultural jobs, now form the bulk of new "deep poverty" cases.

10. In April 2005, Israeli forces expelled 300 Palestinian families (1,500 persons) and confiscated 10,000 dunums of land east of Tubas.[9] South-east of Bethlehem they expelled six families, requisitioned 20 water wells and destroyed 20 shelters for about 22,000 sheep and 500 camels. Subsequently, Israeli forces ordered hundreds of Bedouins in Sawahra al-Sharkiyya, in the central valley, to surrender 25,000 dunums of land.[10]

Property destruction and confiscation

11. No United Nations entity systematically monitors house demolitions, land confiscations or the destruction of agricultural land in the West Bank. However, through the course of its work in 2005, UNRWA recorded a total of 224 Palestinian structures[11] demolished by the Israeli army in the West Bank, 39 of which belonged to Palestine refugees. Other sources place the number at 251 structures destroyed through September 2005.[12] Reasons for the demolition orders, as given by the Israeli army, were lack of construction permit, being close to the constructed sections of the barrier, or being the house of a Palestinian detainee.

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[6] Women's Organization for Political Prisoners, Newsletter January 2006, "Female political prisoners in Israeli prisons" (see www.kibush.co.il/show_file.asp?num=11943).

[7] Refugee population according to UNRWA statistics as of 31 March 2005 (www.un.org/unrwa/publications/pdf/rr_countryandarea.pdf); West Bank general population according to *The World Factbook*, as of 2005 estimates (www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/we.html#People).

[8] UNRWA contributions; *Ha'aretz* (7 November 2005) (www.haaretz.com).

[9] One dunum equals 1/10 hectare.

[10] Jamal Juma, "The eastern wall: closing the circle of our ghettoization", Znet (24 December 2005) (www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=107&ItemID=9398.

[11] Residential houses, agricultural houses, tents, commercial shacks and livestock barracks are included under the denomination of structure.

[12] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Consolidated Appeals Process (December 2005) (www.ochaopt.org).

12. According to UNRWA, among particularly affected locations were Bardala village in the Nablus area, where Israeli security forces demolished 10 agricultural structures reportedly belonging to 210 Palestinians, among them 35 registered refugee families. Additionally, a number of demolition orders were delivered to refugees families of Arab Hathalin in the Hebron area.

13. Also significant was a confiscation order for five hectares issued in February 2005 in Shu'fat Camp, reportedly for expansion of the checkpoint at the camp entrance and the deployment of a gate in the barrier. Confiscation orders continued being delivered throughout 2005, according to the projected route of the barrier, affecting refugee households living outside of camps.

14. On 10 October 2005, Israeli contractors removed large quantities of topsoil from 'Ayn al-Baydha' lands, transporting it to nearby settlements. Other actions in 2005 included Israeli soldiers confiscating and selling local Palestinians' sheep herds.[13]

15. Israeli authorities destroyed at least 114 Palestinian homes in occupied Jerusalem through 2005.[14] In July 2005, the Jerusalem municipality announced its intentions to demolish 88 homes in the Palestinian Silwan neighbourhood of occupied East Jerusalem, amid 1,000 demolitions currently planned.[15]

16. The construction of military observation towers, new road barriers and the West Bank barrier have resulted in the requisition of 7,884 dunums (788 hectares) of land in the West Bank between August 2005 and January 2006.[16]

17. In the Gaza Strip, no refugee shelters were destroyed or damaged by the Israeli army in 2005. This is a major change from 2004, which saw major destruction in Rafah and Jabalia owing to Israeli incursions. According to UNRWA statistics, since the start of the crisis in September 2000, over 2,990 shelters, home to 28,500 people from the Gaza Strip, have been destroyed or damaged beyond repair.

18. The Gaza Strip also saw a reduction in land-levelling operations. In total, 180 hectares of agricultural land were bulldozed in the Gaza Strip. Bulldozing operations ceased in April 2005. The destruction of orchards has contributed significantly to food insecurity in the Gaza Strip. For example, over 50 per cent of Beit Hanoun orchards have been destroyed in the past four years.

19. Israeli forces have razed 28,882 dunums of agricultural land, uprooting trees and destroying crops belonging to Palestinians and impoverishing 60,101 Palestinians.[17] Of that land, Israeli forces razed 8,000 dunums more than once and razed approximately 26 cultivated dunums in 2005. Since 2000, Israeli forces have destroyed 244 wells in the Gaza Strip, including two drinking-water sources, and one in 2005. In October 2005, Israeli forces reoccupied and transformed a swath of agricultural land 2,100-2,700 m wide and 6,350 m long along the northern Gaza

[13] Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ), "The ongoing Israeli violations in the Jordan Valley" (14 January 2006) (www.poica.org/editor/case_studies/view.php?recordID=745).

[14] Land Research Center, "Forced eviction of Palestinian citizens and demolition of their houses in occupied Jerusalem is growing Israeli policy" (29 November 2005).

[15] *BBC News* (1 June 2005) (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4597401.stm).

[16] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "West Bank closure count and analysis" (January 2006) (www.ochaopt.org).

[17] A dunum equals 1,000 m^2.

Strip border into an Israeli military launching and shelling position, extending from the sea eastward to the former industrial zone.[18]

20. Physical capital loss in the occupied Palestinian territory is estimated at $3.5 billion, as a result of destruction of private and public infrastructure and capital stock and overuse of surviving physical capital. This estimated loss is equivalent to 30 per cent of pre-2000 Palestinian capital stock. In addition, the cumulative economic opportunity cost of potential income lost over the period 2000-2004 is estimated at $6.4 billion (1997 dollars), or a value equal to 140 per cent of the Palestinian gross domestic product (GDP) before 2000. Thus, the Palestinian economy operated with a much smaller capital base in 2005 than that of 1999.[19]

Mobility restrictions and closure policies, including access to humanitarian assistance

21. The Israeli closure system is a primary cause of poverty and humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, and restricts Palestinian access to health and education services, employment, markets and social and religious networks.[16]

22. The West Bank closure system comprises a series of blockages placed by the Israeli army to control and restrict Palestinian movement within the West Bank and between the West Bank and Israel. The Government of Israel has stated that the closure regime and restrictions of movement are part of Israeli security policies designed to prevent attacks on Israeli citizens.

23. The north-south barrier and the simultaneous east-west bisection of the West Bank at its heart has effectively surrounded towns such as Qalqiliya, Bethlehem and occupied Jerusalem. Israel's closures and land confiscations in the Jordan Valley increasingly isolate Jericho.[20] Completing the encirclement of all major Palestinian population centres, Israel has established putative borderlines that enclose most of the Palestinian population.[21]

24. Despite some easing of closure, Palestinian movement in the West Bank remains problematic. Access by some villagers to nearby urban centres improved temporarily when the number of closure obstacles decreased to 376 between February and August 2005; however, by March 2006 there were 471 obstacles. Movement between the southern, middle and northern parts of the West Bank remained problematic. Important obstacles to movement remained in place in areas considered by the Israeli authorities to be subject to security threats, including

[18] Habitat International Coalition, Housing and Land Rights Network, and Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, "Israel's violations of Palestinian civilians' rights to housing and land in the occupied Palestinian territory".

[19] UNCTAD, "Report on UNCTAD's assistance to the Palestinian people" (TD/B/52/2) (21 July 2005).

[20] Aluf Been, "Israel begins construction of police station in E-1 area", *Ha'aretz* (14 March 2006) (www.haaretz.com).

[21] Chris McGreal, "Israel unveils plan to encircle Palestinian state", *The Guardian* (8 February 2006) (www.guardian.co.uk/israel/story/0,,1705021.00.html).

settlements, junctions between Palestinian roads and Israeli bypass roads and certain major urban centres such as Nablus and Hebron.[22]

25. Israeli forces have surrounded Jericho governorate with seven permanent checkpoints, foreclosing regular Palestinian access and, on 11 February 2006, sealing the entire governorate for the first time.[23]

26. For Palestinian workers and traders, access to and from the Gaza Strip eased in the first part of 2005, progressively allowing a low daily average of 66 crossings in January to a peak daily average of 3,950 crossings in June. Workers' access to Israel was virtually shut down just prior to and following disengagement, with only 1,304 Gazans able to exit the Strip daily by November 2005.[24] By the end of November, however, that figure had climbed to approximately 4,000. According to a recent study by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Israeli authorities granted special exit permits for humanitarian (medical) passage to Israel and Egypt to 84 per cent of applicants in the three months following disengagement.[25]

27. Access by health and humanitarian workers to different areas in the West Bank continued to be impeded in the form of denials, delays and obstructions. There were 720 access incidents reported by humanitarian agencies and 278 reported by ambulance providers in the first 10 months of 2005.[24] UNRWA incurred over $42 million in losses and additional costs between October 2000 and October 2005 as a result of movement restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities on grounds of security. Over $10 million in losses were incurred through 2005 alone. The bulk of those losses were in lost labour and port charges. The total cost incurred to UNRWA in lost working hours in 2005 was $154,830, compared to $1.83 million in 2004.

28. In the light of the July 2004 International Court of Justice advisory opinion, the United Nations is not to seek permits for access to areas within the West Bank that are located to west of the barrier. United Nations agencies have agreed not to seek such permits and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), in cooperation with the United Nations and the Task Force on Project Implementation, has initiated a working level dialogue with the Israeli Government to attempt to resolve this issue.

29. Convoy arrangements between the West Bank and Gaza Strip were agreed in principle under the Quartet-facilitated Access and Movement Agreement of November 2005. Implementation of the agreement, which was to commence on 15 December 2005, has been delayed as a result of security threats cited by Israel.[25]

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[22] Some checkpoints and crossings through the barrier have been upgraded, suggesting a more permanent presence. Israel is also constructing underpasses and bridges that link Palestinian areas separated from each other by Israeli settlements and bypass roads. OCHA has noted that 28 underpasses and bridges have been constructed and 16 are planned; see Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian update — closure count and analysis" (August 2005) (www.ochaopt.org).

[23] ARIJ, "Under the slogan of security, the Israeli Occupation Forces imprisons Jericho residents" (14 February 2006) (www.poica.org/editor/case_studies/view.php?recordID=769).

[24] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian update — the Jordan Valley" (October 2005) (www.ochaopt.org).

[25] Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) contribution to the report (29 December 2005) (UNSCO contribution).

30. Restriction on movement to and from the Gaza Strip for humanitarian goods and personnel generally improved in comparison to 2004, but remained closely linked to security incidents or alerts at the main crossing points of Karni (goods) and Erez (personnel). Improved dialogue between the Israeli authorities and the donor Task Force on Project Implementation led to the clearance of a large backlog of United Nations humanitarian containers early in the year, and to swifter passage of humanitarian personnel at the Erez crossing. A clear, predictable humanitarian access regime, as set out in the minimum standards for access document of the Task Force, did not materialize.[25]

31. During 2005, the Erez checkpoint north of the Gaza Strip was fully closed to Palestinians for 156 days;[26] Israeli authorities closed the Erez industrial zone for 256 days and the Sofa crossing south of the Gaza Strip for 27 full days. During the same period, they closed the Rafah terminal (the only border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt) for 118 full days and 11 partial days. The Gaza airport remained closed for the entire period. The Karni checkpoint (the main commercial crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel) was closed for 55 full days and 305 partial days in 2005.[2]

32. UNRWA has reported that within the Gaza Strip, the Gush Qatif checkpoint on the main north-south road was fully closed for 4 days and partially closed on 96 days. During the same period, Netzarim junction was closed for 254 days. All internal closures were lifted on 12 September 2005, following the completion of the Israeli withdrawal, allowing free Palestinian movement across the Gaza Strip. These positive events are unlikely to arrest the deepening crisis in the Gaza Strip unless they are soon followed by further measures to secure commercial export outlets and to ensure a land link to the West Bank.[25] The Rafah terminal was handed over to the Palestinian Authority on 12 September 2005. It remained closed from 18 September to 26 November 2005, until an agreement on border-crossing procedures was reached between the parties. By the end of December, the terminal was functioning for up to eight hours per day.[2]

33. In addition, throughout 2005 the Israeli authorities banned the movement of humanitarian goods from Israel into the Gaza Strip through the Erez crossing, the main transportation hub. The Karni crossing was then designated the sole crossing point for humanitarian goods coming into the Gaza Strip. The Israeli-imposed "back-to-back" haulage system on vehicles transporting goods violates the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations by impeding the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Import/export levels at Karni remained at approximately 2004 levels, although during the period of July to August 2005 the Israeli authorities permitted increased movement of containers in order to pre-position supplies in preparation for the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Agreement was reached in November 2005 between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to extend the opening hours at the crossing and to regularize passage of traffic.[2] However, between 1 January and 19 March 2006, the Karni crossing was closed for 46 days. On 19 March 2006, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs issued a warning that most bakeries in the Gaza Strip were closed on that day because wheat flour stocks were exhausted. UNRWA was unable to start its emergency food distribution on 19 March because of insufficient wheat

[26] Approximately 1,000 Palestinian labourers crossed into Israel each day. Prior to September 2000, the figure was approximately 30,000.

flour supplies. The World Food Programme reported that 3,594 metric tons (mt) of wheat flour contracted to local mills were unable to enter the Gaza Strip during the brief period Karni was opened.[27]

34. Ongoing construction of the barrier, the completion of new passage points and the introduction of new identity technologies have made Palestinian access to occupied East Jerusalem from the West Bank increasingly complicated.

Barrier

35. Israel continues construction of the barrier as per the new route approved by the Israeli cabinet in February 2005, contrary to General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of July 2004, which acknowledged the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice that the construction of the barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem, is contrary to international law. According to the revised route, an additional 40-kilometre segment is expected to surround the Ma'ale Adumim settlement, the settlements near it (Kfar Adumim, Antut, Nofei Prat and Kedar) and the separate Ari'el/Emmanuel "fingers". These two sections comprise 16 per cent of the barrier's total 670-kilometre (km) length. Further changes involved the Gush Etzion sections of the barrier and an extension to the barrier route along the southern Hebron hills.[2]

36. As of October 2005, approximately 243 km (36.3 per cent) of the barrier have been completed, while 166 km (24.8 per cent) are under construction.[28] The barrier route places approximately 10 per cent of West Bank territory on its west side.[29] Approximately 75 per cent of settlers will be located on the west side of the barrier,[30] where, contrastingly, their movement and access is de facto unrestricted. Some 70,000 settlers currently remain east of the barrier.[31]

37. According to UNRWA, 10.1 per cent of some of the most fertile Palestinian land, home to approximately 50,000 Palestinians living in 38 communities, is expected to be isolated between the barrier and the Green Line, severely limiting the Palestinian potential for urban and agricultural development. The barrier and its population control/transfer regime, integrated with Israeli confiscation, settlement and separation policies, stand as the most visually obvious factors affecting Palestinian life. The cumulative impact of the barrier on Palestinian livelihoods makes subsistence untenable, owing to the constant bulldozing and confiscation of large Palestinian land areas and the incremental eviction orders, as well as demolition of Palestinian property in both rural and urban areas. Seemingly arbitrary passage restrictions hinder those eligible to apply for permits from reaching lands west of the barrier (see A/60/271, para. 17), effectively rendering idle, impoverishing and dispossessing Palestinian landowners. Typically, only titled

[27] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Gaza Strip situation report — the humanitarian impact of the Karni crossing closure: bread running out in Gaza" (19 March 2006) (www.ochaopt.org).

[28] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian impact of the West Bank Barrier", Update No. 6, January 2006 (www.ochaopt.org).

[29] This includes East Jerusalem, the Ariel finger and Ma'ale Adumim settlement expansion plan.

[30] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Preliminary analysis — the humanitarian implications of the February 2005 projected West Bank barrier route", Update No. 4, April 2005 (www.ochaopt.org).

[31] Peace Now, "The West Bank — facts and figures" (August 2005) (www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=195&docid=1430).

owners are allowed access to their lands, forsaking all other needed farm hands. Permitting only singular — especially elderly — landowners to tend their fields alone immobilizes social capital and drives titleholders to physical exhaustion and despair.[32]

38. A further deterioration in the living standards of UNRWA-registered Palestine refugees is also expected by the increasing eligibility and passage restrictions, hindering the ability of those applying for permits to reach land located west of the completed barrier in the northern West Bank areas. Furthermore, once constructed, the Ma'ale Adumim bloc of the barrier is expected to severely impede movement between the northern and southern areas of the West Bank, adding to the complex system of terminal-like checkpoints and the pedestrian and/or vehicle gates planned to regulate persons and goods access into and from the city. The completion of the planned barrier around Jerusalem will have a significant impact upon the ability of UNRWA to provide assistance to the refugee community in the West Bank. Notably, 60 per cent of the Agency's West Bank field office staff and staff from occupied East Jerusalem are expected to face access problems travelling to their duty stations in occupied East Jerusalem. Similar restrictions involve the Agency's programmes providing social, relief, education and health services.

39. Through September 2005, Israeli land-levelling and confiscation continued, with more than 4,100 hectares taken for construction of the barrier.[33] No official party has undertaken to quantify the consequent costs and losses consistent with the General Assembly's call in 2004 for a register of damages arising from the barrier (see A/ES-10/L.18/Rev.1).

Israeli settlements

40. Israel transferred some 7,200 former Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip to Israeli settlements in the West Bank and occupied Jerusalem. The Israeli Government has also provided special incentives to increase Israeli presence inside Israel, where sizeable communities of Palestinian citizens remain.[34]

41. After the dismantling of four northern West Bank settlements (Ganim, Kadim, Homesh and Sanur), Israel maintains 121 settlements in the West Bank, plus 14 Israeli settlements in occupied Jerusalem.[34] As of 31 August 2005, there are an estimated 100 unofficial settlements or "outposts" in the West Bank.[35]

42. Between January and June 2005, 1,097 new settlement-housing starts showed a 28 per cent increase over the 860 in early 2004.[36] Correspondingly, ongoing construction of settlements at the end of June 2004 totalled 3,984 housing units, which grew at 6 per cent at the end of June 2005, with 4,207 units under

[32] *Do-it-yourself Apartheid* (http://stopthewall.org/activistresources/983.shtml).

[33] UNSCO contribution; Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Consolidated Appeals Process (December 2005).

[34] Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, "Taking inventory of the West Bank", *Settlements in Focus*, vol. 1, issue 9 (9 September 2005) (www.peacenow.org/briefs.asp?rid=&cid=1393).

[35] Ibid, "The West Bank — facts and figures" (August 2005) (www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=195&docid=1430).

[36] Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics; Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, "Current trends in settlement construction and growth", Peace Now (December 2005) (www.peacenow.org/briefs.asp?rid=&cid=1393).

construction.[37] At the end of 2005 there were 3,696 new West Bank settlement housing units being built, in addition to 1,654 in occupied Jerusalem. Large-scale housing construction (hundreds of units) is under way in seven settlements within the barrier. Medium-scale housing construction (tens of units) is proceeding in another 17 settlements, all but three of which fall inside the barrier route.[37]

43. The Israeli Government initiated around 57 per cent of settlement construction projects during 2005, funding around 40 per cent of the total investment. Israeli Government construction investment was greater in the occupied territory than inside Israel, where the government initiated around 27 per cent of construction projects and funded 16 per cent of total investment.[38] While Israel built twice as many new settler homes in the occupied Palestinian territory in the first quarter of 2005 as in the first quarter of 2004, housing starts inside Israel fell 6 per cent from the first quarter of 2004 (see A/60/271, para. 23).

44. Conservative calculations estimate Israel's annual non-military spending for the settlements in recent years at NIS 2.5 billion.[39]

45. Since 2001, Israel's annual settler population growth rate in the West Bank has exceeded 5 per cent, compared to the general Israeli rate of growth, which is estimated at 1.8 per cent.[34] The rates of the 12 settlements west of the barrier route (Israeli side) with the highest growth rates range from 5.3 per cent (Immanuel, in Ariel bloc) to 16.1 per cent (Mevo Horon, near the Green Line). East of the barrier route, the annual population growth rates of 15 expanding settlements range from 7.7 per cent, in Ma'ale Michmash, north of occupied Jerusalem, to 35 per cent in Gittit, in the Jordan Valley, with the highest current population transfer rate.[34] The number of West Bank Israeli settlers exceeded 243,000 at the end of 2005, with 190,000 additional settlers in occupied Jerusalem (see E/CN.4/2006/29).[40]

46. Most Israeli settlers in the West Bank are now situated between the Green Line and the barrier (Jordan Valley settlements notwithstanding). Settlements in that "closed zone" are expanding and new settlements are being developed. The Israeli civil and military authorities indulge the settlers with assured lenient treatment. Settlers have become more aggressive towards Palestinians. Settler violence and theft have increased, especially in the Hebron area, with 68 incidents reported in May 2005 and 67 in June 2005 (see A/60/271, para. 27; E/CN.4/2006/29).

Natural resources, water and the environment

47. Israel uses 73 per cent of the water available from West Bank aquifers, Palestinians in the West Bank use 17 per cent and Israeli settlers use 10 per cent. While 10 to 14 per cent of Palestine's GDP is related to agriculture, 90 per cent of Palestinian farms have to rely on rain-fed methods. Agriculture accounts for only 3 per cent of Israeli GDP, but Israel irrigates more than 50 per cent of its

[37] Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, "Current trends in settlement construction and growth", Peace Now (December 2005) (www.peacenow.org/briefs.asp?rid=&cid=1393).

[38] Gadi Golan, "Adva — Settlements in territories still get bigger budgets" (12 February 2006) (http://globes.co.il/serveen/globes/docview.asp?did=1000060578&fid=942).

[39] Moti Bassok, "The extra civilian price tag — at least NIS 2.5 billion a year", *Ha'aretz* (www.haaretz.com); Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, "Current trends in settlement construction and growth", Peace Now (December 2005) (www.peacenow.org/briefs.asp?rid=&cid=1393).

[40] Associated Press, "Jewish settler population seen growing 4.3 per cent in 2005", *Ha'aretz* (2 December 2005).

landholdings.[41] Israeli settlements in the Jordan Valley alone, for example, consume an equivalent of 75 per cent of the water that the entire West Bank Palestinian population of approximately two million consumes for domestic and urban uses.[42]

48. The Israeli occupation has negatively affected the environment and natural resources of the occupied Palestinian territory. At least 14 settlements drain liquid waste onto Palestinian lands.[43] In addition to direct pollution created by Israeli forces and settlements, the occupation has annulled Palestinian plans to establish dumping sites. Israeli military closure of landfills has complicated solid-waste management in the West Bank. Pollution from dismantled settlements now poses a potential hazard in the Gaza Strip. Disproportionately to their respective populations, Palestinians in the West Bank produce some 500,000 tons of solid waste annually (1,370 tons daily), while Israeli settlements produce an average 224,000 tons yearly (614 tons daily).[44]

49. In April 2005, Israeli authorities began to transfer a planned 10,000 tons of garbage monthly from the Dan and Sharon regions across the Green Line to dump it in the West Bank at Abu Shusha quarry. Four water wells serving Nablus and nearby villages are located very near the dumping site.

50. Israeli movement restrictions impede Palestinians from assessing contamination risks and managing nature reserves, all of which are located in areas that Israel controls. While an essential tool of environmental management is an inventory of national hazardous waste substances, no such inventory exists in the occupied Palestinian territory.[45]

Public health and food insecurity

51. The rate of chronic malnutrition (stunting) in children under five has increased, reaching almost 10 per cent. Children in the Gaza Strip are the most affected. In the occupied Palestinian territory, some 350,000 children are stunted, with malnutrition mostly afflicting children 12 to 23 months old. More than 15 per cent of them are malnourished at this period critical to their future development.[3]

52. Newborn mortality accounts for about three quarters of all infant deaths. Notably in the Gaza Strip, the under-one-year and under-five year mortality figures have increased by about 30 per cent, mainly owing to an increase in the mortality of children under 12 months. This is the consequence of poor newborn care in hospitals. Currently, in major hospitals of the Gaza Strip about one in three newborns admitted to newborn care units dies. About 8 per cent of children have low birth weight (below 2,500 grams), contributing to infant and newborn mortality and severe morbidity. These are severe constraints for child development outcomes.[3]

53. Mental health is an increasing concern in the occupied Palestinian territory. Recent studies have shown that stressors such as the severe restriction of movement

[41] Palestine Monitor, "Water in Palestine", fact sheet (www.palestinemonitor.org/new_web/factsheet_water.htm).

[42] B'Teselem, "Land grab: Israel's settlement policy in the West Bank" (May 2002).

[43] Palestinian National Information Center, "Israeli violations of the Palestinian environment" (www.pnic.gov.ps/english/Environment_Israeli%20Violations.html).

[44] ARIJ, "Israel escalates its violations against the Palestinian environment: the new Israeli dumping site" (5 April 2005) (www.poica.org/editor/case_studies/view.php?recordID=548).

[45] See www.grid.unep.ch/product/map/index.php?region=west_asia.

and lack of access to education and health care are present in everyday life. One study[46] showed that 52 per cent of those surveyed had thought of ending their life, 92 per cent felt no hope for the future, 100 per cent reported feeling stressed and 84 per cent expressed feelings of constant anger because of circumstances beyond their control.

54. Non-communicable diseases present important public health problems. Among the eight leading causes of death, seven are non-communicable diseases. In 2004, 3,481 persons died from cardiovascular diseases (1,781 males and 1,700 females), with a rate of 99.7 per 100,000 population.[47]

55. Food insecurity is adversely affecting the health of women and children. The results of a study conducted by UNRWA revealed that 54.7 per cent and 34.3 per cent of children of ages 6-36 months are anaemic, as are 40.2 per cent and 29.9 per cent of pregnant women and 45.7 per cent and 23 per cent of nursing mothers in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, respectively. Other micronutrient deficiencies of concern are subclinical vitamin A deficiency,[48] rickets and iodine deficiency. The incidence of obesity and diet related chronic diseases appears to be increasing, particularly among the older age group, presenting a major challenge in the area of nutrition.[49]

56. Israel's construction of the barrier has impeded access to health care. Access to primary health-care services and UNRWA-contracted hospitals in occupied East Jerusalem decreased 18 per cent in 2005 and is likely to deteriorate further with the continuing barrier construction. In order to mitigate effects on health, UNRWA has been running five mobile units since 2003, treating more than 12,000 patients in 2005.

Youth and education

57. Fewer Palestinian children start school each year. The quality of their education is deteriorating. The student drop-out rate is increasing dramatically and few children have the opportunity to experience a child-friendly learning environment, with safe spaces and opportunities for sports and recreation. In addition, children lack educational materials and schools lack adequate teaching aids.[3]

58. Live-fire from Israeli positions, air attacks and sporadic sonic booms particularly affect children, instilling constant fear and keeping them awake at night. With half of the Gaza Strip's 1.3 million residents under the age of 18 years, and three quarters of all households having at least one child in school, daily events impede educational efforts and erode past achievements. One third of families indicate that their child suffers from at least one symptom of psychosocial distress, impeding concentration at school.[3]

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[46] Palestinian Counseling Center, "The psychological implications of Israel's separation wall on Palestinians" (2004).

[47] World Health Organization contribution to the report (WHO contribution).

[48] The Maram Project, "Prevalence of vitamin A deficiency among children 12 to 59 months of age in the West Bank and Gaza Strip" (2004).

[49] Palestinian National Authority Ministry of Health and WHO, "The state of nutrition, West Bank and Gaza Strip, 2005", cited in WHO contribution.

59. Israeli military operations forced UNRWA schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to close for a total of 272 days in the 2004/2005 scholastic year (compared to 391 days in 2003/2004).

60. In the West Bank, UNRWA schools lost 29 school days and teachers lost over 705 working days during the 2004/2005 school year. In addition, instructors lost 23 working days during the same period at three training centres.

61. Before the redeployment of Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip, internal closures prevented Gaza Strip teachers from reaching their duty station. During the 2004/2005 school year, UNRWA teachers recorded a collective loss of 29,399 teaching days. Since October 2000 more than 264,000 school days have been lost.

62. UNRWA has also reported that in the 2004/2005 academic year, no Gaza Strip students (277 applied) were able to attend technical training centres in the West Bank for lack of a passage permit. Moreover, closures continued to prevent students in higher education from reaching their institutions, barring Gaza Strip students in particular from reaching West Bank universities.

63. Although examination scores of the 2004/2005 period were slightly higher than those of the 2003/2004 period, overall educational achievement continues to decline. Since the 1999/2000 school year, Arabic scores in the Gaza Strip declined by 6.1 per cent, math scores by 8.5 per cent and science scores by 12 per cent. In the West Bank, only 44 per cent of eighth-graders passed their Arabic examination and 49.6 per cent passed science. However, these figures represent a major improvement (10 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively) over the previous year.

Economic indicators

64. World Bank estimates for overall economic performance point to the continuation of GDP growth over the past three years (GDP growth is estimated at 6 per cent for 2005). However, this growth does not reflect the economic potential of the occupied Palestinian territory, as the current GDP is approximately 25 per cent lower than it was in 1999.[50]

65. Demographic growth, which outran average growth in GDP during the period 2000-2005, contributed to negative growth in annual GDP per capita. Demographic growth also generated a labour force involving some 40,000 new entrants each year, outpacing demand in the labour market, and thereby swelling the number of the unemployed and adding pressure on existing household incomes.[51]

66. Despite persistently high rates of unemployment during 2005, estimated by the World Bank at 23.4 per cent,[52] the labour market improved, with the unemployment rate dropping some 3 per cent from 2004. Job creation in the Gaza Strip, largely a result of Israel's disengagement, increased 14 per cent, while the West Bank saw an 8 per cent increase.[53]

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[50] International Monetary Fund, "Macroeconomic developments and outlook in the West Bank and Gaza" (December 2005), as cited in the UNSCO contribution.

[51] World Bank, "West Bank and Gaza update" (June 2005).

[52] World Bank, "Economic update and potential outlook" (15 March 2006).

[53] World Bank, "The Palestinian economy and the prospects for its recovery" (December 2005), as cited in the UNSCO contribution.

67. The financial sector remains sound, due to the expansion of the private sector and increase in credit; yet a rapidly growing public sector wage bill has widened the budget deficit significantly. According to the World Bank, the fiscal situation is now unsustainable. Employment by the Palestinian Authority, however, continues to rise, with some 4,000 militants being integrated into the security forces. According to Palestinian Authority security organizations, some 8,000 to 10,000 employees were identified as "non-performing". The projected fiscal deficit, driven primarily by wage cost increases, was calculated by the International Monetary Fund to exceed $900 million for 2006.[50]

68. Despite GDP growth, both the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and the World Bank reported persistently high levels of poverty. Although available statistics vary, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated poverty at 62 per cent of the population.[54] Poverty in the occupied Palestinian territory evolved in 2005 in significant ways. First, geographical concentration of poverty is increasing, with higher levels registered in the Gaza Strip, in the southern areas of the West Bank (Hebron area) and in the northern areas of the West Bank (Jenin area). Second, the gap between rich and poor is increasing, which demonstrates the inability of the market to ensure equitable distribution of wealth. Third, the number of Palestinians living in "deep poverty" (that is, a daily consumption level below $1.6/day) increased during 2005.[25]

69. Steady economic growth with persistent and possibly rising poverty rates suggests that growth alone has not been sufficient to alleviate or reverse the cumulative impact of the conflict. Several factors appear responsible for eroding the positive effects of growth over the 2003-2005 period. These include the immediate and cumulative effects of intensified closures, which continued to restrict commercial and individual movement, thereby fragmenting established economic linkages in the occupied Palestinian territory and complicating access to employment, markets and services.[25]

70. An overall decline in income levels, in particular but not exclusively among those who have moved from employment in Israel to lower paying activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, shows declining levels of household consumption. Also contributing to poverty is the exhaustion of assets and borrowing options since September 2000 by large numbers of households seeking to cope with declining incomes, rising job insecurity or outright loss of jobs and incomes.[55] The effects of those losses were largely offset through the provision of emergency assistance.

71. The private sector continued to expand. Private sector credit expanded by 30 per cent in 2005, but remained lower than in other countries of the region.[50] In a climate of fiscal crisis, growth in private sector activities injected the economy with significant liquidity.[53]

72. Closures remain a significant hindrance to economic recovery. Yet, according to the World Bank, the situation has become increasingly predictable, allowing for adaptation. Economic growth in Israel has increased demand for Palestinian exports. The number of Palestinians working in Israel also increased remittances by 25 per

[54] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian update — emerging humanitarian risks" (January 2006) (www.ochaopt.org).

[55] World Bank and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Deep Palestinian Poverty in the Midst of Economic Crisis* (October 2004).

cent in comparison to 2004.[53] Nevertheless, the pace of economic growth witnessed since 2003 suggests that pre-September 2000 per capita income levels might not return before 2012.[56]

Status of women

73. Palestinian women historically have had low participation in the workforce. However, women traditionally have played a major role in agricultural production. With the loss of land to Israel, Palestinian women are doubly affected, by the loss of both a vital source of income and their role as economic producers. Affected by the barrier, women's mobility has decreased to about 85.7 per cent in the western part of the barrier, and to 63.3 per cent in the eastern part of the barrier.[57] Before the September 2000 crisis, their participation rate was 15.8 per cent, but with the Israeli closures and barriers, the rate of women in the job force declined to 10.5 per cent.[58]

III. Occupied Syrian Golan

74. In 2005, the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan was estimated at 18,400. The Arab population is fully incorporated into the Israeli legal, administrative and social service delivery systems. Some 14 per cent have opted for Israeli citizenship.[25]

75. The total area of the Syrian Golan under Israeli occupation is 1.15 million dunums (1,150 square km). About 1 million dunums are considered suitable for grazing land. At the moment, Israel utilizes about 500,000 dunums for cattle, while 100,000 dunums were declared as natural reservations. The remainder (400,000 dunums) are closed military areas. Cultivated land is divided between the Syrian Arab population and the 20,000 Israeli settlers and Syrian Arabs can access about 20,000 dunums, while Israeli settlers have access to about 80,000 dunums.[59] Although Arab and Israeli populations in the Golan are roughly equivalent in number, Israeli settlements are reported to use a disproportionate quantity of water resources for domestic and agricultural purposes.

76. As of 2005, Israeli settlers occupy 33 settlements, of which 27 are primarily agricultural. Israeli settlers trade their produce of wine, beef, apples, cherries and mineral water in Israel's domestic and export markets.[60] The other settlements are focused on industry and tourism (including two tourist facilities on the eastern coast of Lake Tiberias). Additionally, Qatzrin and Bnei Yehuda settlements maintain industrial areas.[25]

77. The Arab population of the occupied Syrian Golan is generally unable to travel to the Syrian Arab Republic to visit family members on the other side of the line of separation and have, over time, experienced increasing limitations on land use owing to military and environmental zoning restrictions imposed by Israel. A large

[56] World Bank, "The Palestinian economy and the PA's fiscal situation" (1 February 2006).

[57] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Impact of the Israeli measures on the economic conditions of Palestinian households" (April-June 2004).

[58] Amnesty International, "*Israel and the Occupied Territories — conflicts, occupation and patriarchy — women carry the burden*" (31 March 2005).

[59] UNSCO contribution (see http://english.golan.org.il/vaad/efacts.asp).

[60] See http://golan-marsad.org/default.asp?sn=9#a28.

number of the Syrian Arab population has lost significant acreage traditionally used for pasture. This has resulted in changing production, commercial and land-use patterns within a traditionally rural/pastoral society.

78. The Arab population labour force in the occupied Golan is made up of some 6,500 workers, of which some 750 work in local services. Another 3,200 work in Israel in agriculture and construction. Nearly 40 per cent of the total labour force is unemployed.[61]

79. Trade in agricultural products, particularly apples, olive oil, honey and other horticultural goods, relies mainly on Israeli markets, with a small percentage of surplus apple production exported to the Syrian Arab Republic each year with facilitation by the International Committee of the Red Cross.[62] The export of the 2006 apple harvest began on 19 March 2006. Over a period of four weeks some 400 mt will cross the line of control.[25]

80. The Arab population has become dependent on Israeli agricultural products and partially on products of the settlements (especially dairy-related products). Production and trade in livestock have decreased markedly since 1967. Local opportunities in the construction sector remain limited owing to housing restrictions.[25]

81. Israel has applied its educational system in the occupied Syrian territory since 1967, replacing the Syrian curriculum. Six elementary schools, three junior high schools and two high schools operate for the Syrian Arab community. Since 1987, delegations of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Damascus and Tel Aviv have facilitated the passage of an average of 400 students each year across the line of separation to attend Syrian universities.[25] During 2005, the International Committee of the Red Cross handled the administrative details for between 400 and 500 pilgrims (religious men only) wishing to make an annual visit to holy sites in the Syrian Arab Republic. The International Committee of the Red Cross has also facilitated several weddings for couples from either side of the line of separation, including five such weddings in 2005.[63]

82. The Arab community funds and operates five health clinics in the occupied Golan, providing basic maternal-newborn health services, including vaccinations. In addition, the Israeli Ministry of Health funds one basic health clinic that the Syrian Arab community operates. The nearest referral hospital is a 30-minute drive from the Arab communities in the occupied Golan into Israel. Specialized services are within a 70-minute drive inside Israel. There are three fully equipped Israeli ambulances in the occupied Golan area, two in Majdal Shams and one in Bqa'atha. Where necessary, patients are treated at clinics inside the Israeli settlements of the occupied Golan.[25] The International Committee of the Red Cross, with the participation of local non-governmental organizations, is developing plans to construct a 30-bed hospital facility for the community.[25]

83. Landmines remain a hazard for Arab communities in the occupied Golan. A field research study shows that 66 Arab residents have suffered landmine incidents

[61] Interview with Al Marsad in Majdal Shams; cited in the UNSCO contribution.

[62] Interview with International Committee of the Red Cross in Majdal Shams; cited in the UNSCO contribution.

[63] Interview with International Committee of the Red Cross in Jerusalem; cited in the UNSCO contribution.

since 1967, of which 16 were fatal. The data indicate that among the 50 surviving victims, 86 per cent (43 victims) were under the age of 18. Eight of the 16 fatally wounded were under the age of 18.[25]

IV. Conclusions

84. Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank raised the possibility of new movement towards social and economic recovery.

85. Disengagement occurred in a rapid and peaceful manner. The economy grew in 2005 by 6 per cent for the second year running. Unemployment fell by 3 per cent over the previous year. The parties signed the Access and Movement Agreement of November 2005, securing a passage regime from the Gaza Strip to Egypt and ensuring a minimum level of commodity exports from the Gaza Strip. Nonetheless, these gains were insufficient to arrest or reverse the decline in social and economic indicators which showed the ongoing, and in some cases deepening, distress among large numbers of Palestinians. During the first quarter of 2006, crossings for the transfer of goods between the Gaza Strip and Israel were closed over 50 per cent of the time.[64] Poverty rates remained high as result of declining income levels, rising food and transport prices, high demographic growth and increasingly inequitable distribution of wealth.

86. While internal closures in the Gaza Strip were removed, West Bank closures, after several months of easing, were tightened again towards the end of the year. A severe fiscal crisis loomed at the end of 2005, raising serious doubts about the ability of the Palestinian Authority to meet public sector wage commitments for the first months of the new year.

87. Planned elections in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory meant that neither side was in a position to make meaningful policy commitments into 2006. For its part, the international community also signalled its intention to delay additional funding commitments to the occupied Palestinian territory until a new cabinet could be formed in the first half of 2006. A major pledging conference, aiming to raise up to $3 billion in international funds for Palestinian social economic recovery, was nonetheless tentatively scheduled for May 2006, testifying to the ongoing hope of donors that an enabling environment for accelerated social, economic and institutional recovery can be established over the next year.

[64] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Gaza Strip situation report (23 March 2006) (www.ochaopt.org).